



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers®**  
Jacksonville District

# NEWS RELEASE

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P.O. Box 4970 Jacksonville, FL 32232-0019

Contact: Barry D. Vorse

Phone: (904) 232-2236 FAX: (904) 232-2237

Email: Barry.D.Vorse@usace.army.mil

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## **Australia's International Riverfoundation honors Jacksonville District for Upper St. Johns River Basin Project**

A project engineered by the Jacksonville District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has won the Australian-based International Riverfoundation's International Thiess Riverprize for 2008.

The river advocacy organization honored co-sponsors, the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) and the Corps' Jacksonville District for the Upper St. Johns River Basin Project earlier this fall. Jacksonville District Deputy District Engineer for Project Management, David Hobbie, accepted the award for the Corps.

"I was just speaking with Maurice Sterling (SJRWMD project management director) the other day," Hobbie said. "And we both agreed that we know we both do some great work. But when an international body recognizes that fact on a major stage, it really means a great deal to our organizations and to all of the many individual experts involved from both agencies."

The International Riverfoundation called the project "groundbreaking."

"The St. Johns River Basin Project is a large wetlands restoration initiative which addresses environmental degradation and flood control in the headwater region of the St. Johns River," said Professor Paul Greenfield, the Riverprize Judging Panel Chair. "It is one of the largest river restoration projects in the United States and has been a thirty-year collaboration between state and federal water managers. The project uses innovative approaches in design and management to combine



environmental benefits with flood control over sixty kilometers of river length and thousands of acres of floodplain. It covers a total of 247 square miles.

The upper St. Johns River Basin consists of the drainage area of St. Johns River and Marsh, south of Lake Harney and is located in east-central Florida. It includes most of Indian River and Brevard counties and parts of Orange, Osceola, and Okeechobee counties.

The project was originally designed as a flood control effort, but it became a pioneering project for habitat restoration. For example, in 1999 following the completion of one phase of the project, Corps personnel counted 60 ospreys (fish-eating hawks) during a 90-minute airboat tour of the project in an area where there had been none before the project. The results were so positive that the project was often used as an example of success when other efforts toward restoration such as the Kissimmee River and the Everglades were being championed.

“The Upper St. Johns River Basin Project is a model of modern floodplain management—balancing the needs of the river with the people and creatures that depend on it,” Sterling said. “Our efforts to restore the river have shown that working with nature is often preferred to working against her.”

Marking the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the International Thiess Riverprize, the prize began as an initiative in 1999 to award best practice for restoration and the sustainable preservation of rivers and waterways and has awarded over \$2 million to support the ongoing work of organizations in river restoration.

“It’s inspiring to see such dynamic projects across the world improving our waterways’ ecological sustainability year in and year out,” Greenfield said. “The inspirational outcomes of this initiative exemplify the spirit of the prize and it’s an honor to reward a project that has done such a brilliant job taking river and water issues in its own hands and delivering such exceptional results.”

Jacksonville District personnel who have served as project managers for the project include Mike Ornella, who was the first, Pete Milam and Steven Robinson. All three have noted what a pleasure it was to work with the St. Johns River Water Management District.



The prize included a cash award to the SJRWMD of about \$330,000 in U.S. currency. The water management district will earmark the money for ongoing wetland restoration, enhancement and river cleanup programs throughout northeast and east-central Florida.

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